

# Focusing On Managers Bridges The Gap To Customer Satisfaction

By John Geddie, President, Geddie & Associates

MANAGEMENT WHITE PAPER



“Most companies have it all wrong. They don't have to motivate their employees. They have to stop de-motivating them”

– David Sirota, *Harvard Management Update*

It is the individual manager who has the most impact on whether employees thrive and become productive or are discouraged, de-motivated and disengaged. The work environment created by a manager's style can result in a disengaged workforce of clock-watchers and marginal performers who slow forward momentum and spread discontent – or create a motivating workplace where employees thrive.

One of the cardinal research findings of the last decade was the recognition of the impact managers have on the performance of the workforce. The fundamental finding of the work by the Gallup Organization, as reported in the book *First, Break All the Rules*, was that managers can influence productivity, employee satisfaction, and – we think – customer satisfaction.

Customers are often the first to recognize employee dissatisfaction: employee attitudes are quite transparent. When employees are dissatisfied, customers know it. Southwest Airlines believes if you focus on employee satisfaction, it will translate into customer satisfaction. And their record of profitability has validated that argument. Although the evidence is more anecdotal than empirical, we believe there is a direct correlation between employee satisfaction and customer satisfaction.

So what actions can managers take to enhance workforce performance and ultimately improve customer satisfaction? There are several tactics which have proven successful.

**First, you must clarify expectations.** We firmly believe that most employees want to do a good job. The problem is they often don't know what is expected of

them. Managers are unclear about their expectations, yet they express frustration when employees don't do what they expect. Clarify what you expect, provide a feedback loop to ensure the employee clearly understands the expectation, then watch them perform.

**Second, revisit your personal reward-recognition system.**

We are surprised at how often organizations encourage the wrong kind of behavior by rewarding the wrong kind of behavior. If you want people to change their behavior, critically assess your organization's reward system. Are you rewarding people for the right behavior, or are you focused on the wrong metrics? Remember, people do what gets measured – and rewarded.

**Third, adopt a policy of zero tolerance for non-performers.**

If you want to enhance morale and improve the productivity of your top employees, don't let the non-performers continue to slow down momentum. Your top performers want you to have the courage to hold all employees accountable—recognize and reward your high performers and deal with non-performers accordingly.

Let's acknowledge that some people are simply miscast for the roles they are in. It doesn't mean that they are bad people necessarily, they may just not have the DNA to be successful in the role they are in. We believe in giving people a chance to improve – but performance must be improved within a short time frame. Find them a new role – either inside or outside your organization. Ultimately they will be happier and your top performers will be as well.

**Fourth, praise regularly.**

Praise is a universal motivator. We all want to be recognized for good performance. Even people who say they are not motivated by praise appreciate the fact that it shows respect and appreciation for their contributions. Spot bonuses – something as small as a Starbucks gift card – are a tangible way to show appreciation and build employee loyalty.

**Fifth, provide frequent feedback.**

No news is not good news when it comes to providing employee feedback. Employees regularly tell us they are left in the dark about where they stand related to their performance. If you want your employees to perform at their maximum level, engage in an ongoing dialogue about their performance. Focus on the future more than the past by coaching for performance. Employees will build their skills and feel more engaged.

To be fair, your managers may be deficient in these soft skills because they were likely promoted into a managerial role based on technical proficiency. Suddenly, they are given new duties – managing direct reports, not sales or technical work – and expected to perform as well with people as they did in their previous role. Provide your managers with some basic training in how to manage and coach their employees, and you will reap the rewards in employee loyalty and bottom line productivity.

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Consider a one-day refresher course for your managers on how to manage people. Contact us for information on a tailored program for your managers. If customer satisfaction is highly correlated to employee satisfaction, can you afford not to invest in the skills your managers need to succeed?

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contact us at [www.geddie.net](http://www.geddie.net)  
or toll-free 1.800.790.1386

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